

# LEARNING STYLES AND TRAINING PRINCIPLES

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## I. Introduction

There are a lot of valid thoughts and talk these days about appropriate training methods. This is a need expatriate trainers have been aware of. However, there seems to be a major misconception in trying to adapt teaching styles to fit the learning styles of students and trainees. This is an extremely basic and important principle! As expatriate guests in other's countries, we are expected to help our hosts. However, it is my strong conviction that as we should strive very hard to adapt to our hosts' way of doing (language, culture, methods), rather than requiring them to adapt to our ways. Specifically, our teaching/training techniques should be congruent with the cultural style of learning with which they are comfortable and accustomed to following. With that as a premise, I trust this article will give further thoughts into the differences in learning styles, as well as provide some ideas on how to make training methods more culturally appropriate and accommodating to our hosts.

## II. Global - Linear Model

Following is a binary model on learning styles which has been simplified from a presentation by Gloria Kindell given at an SIL. in-service in Dallas, Texas, Spring of 1989.

## GLOBAL (HOLISTIC)

## LINEAR (ANALYTICAL)

### Learning Style

simultaneous perception & processing	sequential perception & processing
intuitive	cognitive
holistic/synthetic	analytical
big picture → details	details → big picture (figure it out myself)
visual (write, watch...)	verbal (read, listen...)
demonstrate and do	explain/lecture and do
active participation	passive participation
'show me how'	'just tell me how'
info needs personalizing	theory is OK
real examples (reality)	hypothetical examples OK
group oriented/dependent	individualistic/independent
'let's do it together'	'I'll do it myself, thanks'
intuitive/feelings	facts/objective
reflective	abstract
free/spirit	boundaries/law
more creative	more precise
attentive to generalities	attentive to details

### Learning Atmosphere

casual/warm/relaxed	formal/serious
informal	formal
desks in circle	desks in a row
people oriented	work oriented
fun! enjoyment!	production!
popcorn and koolaid	pencils and books
time nonexistent	time pressured

### Teacher

part of the gang	authority figure
guide/model/facilitator	leader

### Lessons

contextualization needed      intrinsic and functional

purpose/'why'	focus on lesson content
analogies/comparisons	describe logically
appreciated (it's like)	efficiency/hour oriented
event/project oriented	time conscious
need to finish/closure!	ready to apply now
needs assimilation time	more competitive
less competitive	independent
team work: help and be helped	
appreciates teacher guidance	irritated with too much help
skills	theoretical principles
discussion/dialogue	lecture/rote
dramatization	very economic in:
symbolism/parables	time
object lessons	teachers
illustrations	information
singing	money
humor, fun	

As you have probably realized, most people are neither totally global nor extremely linear. The majority of people are a combination from both sides, or somewhere on a global-linear continuum. Every combination has strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, it is not a matter of one certain learning style being right or good, while another is wrong or bad. Learning styles simply *are*. The important thing is that the teacher or trainer makes his teaching style fit the learning style of the students or trainees. That is, if maximum learning, coupled with maximum motivation, is the goal.

### III. The Problem

Based on observation, studies (see papers by D'Jernies, Sanders, Schoelling), and personal evaluations by PNG nationals themselves, it is quite obvious that the majority of Melanesians tend very much toward having global learning styles. Traditionally, their learning has occurred via wholistic, hands-on, observe and do, informal, event oriented, group dependent methods. They prefer and are comfortable with a more global teaching style.

Herein lies the problem. Most school education is done in a very Western/linear way. Those who have made it through this formal, more theoretically based system, have either been comfortable with a linear teaching style, or they have been able to adapt sufficiently enough to learn by it. Consequently, since a linear or analytical style

of teaching is what was used to teach us (by and large), when we teach, we automatically revert to the model we learned under. Unfortunately though, not everyone is capable of adjusting to the degree it takes to learn from a teaching method based primarily on the lecture and reading modes of imparting information and skills. And many global learners who try, end up only frustrated and defeated in the attempt. Unintentionally, otherwise very intelligent and creative trainees have often become demotivated simply because a teaching style congruous with their cultural upbringing and experience has not been used.

### IV. Suggested Training Principles

Although it has been said before in different ways, the following are a few suggested training methods which could be employed in writers' workshops, teacher training courses, or any type of training course:

1. Let lectures and note taking (passive learning) take a very minimal amount of time. Color-coded charts and notes can be prepared and given as handouts at appropriate times. If it is absolutely necessary to use monologue/lecture as a teaching device, strive to make it as colorful and hearable as possible with many illustrations, examples, comparisons, word pictures, and/or questions to keep the audience actively thinking and involved. [*Rule of thumb*: have at least one comparison, analogy, skit, or example to illustrate every point made in a presentation.]
2. Demonstrations, observation, drama, skits, imitations, singing, media audiovisuals, discussion, games, question-answer, dialogue, hands-on practice and other like means of active participation, should be used as the major medium of communicating new knowledge and concepts (rather than monologue lectures).
3. Start the training with a look (via demonstration, a media presentation, visiting an actual school, or handling a book, etc.) at what is the desired *finished* product. In other words, give the big picture or the big idea in physical form. Trying to explain with words is inadequate here for global learners.
4. Proceed in training by breaking the big picture down into workable chunks, but always present each chunk in the context of the whole. (Keep the big picture in mind.)

5. When the smaller chunks have been learned, gradually practise piecing them back together to formulate the whole again.
6. In teacher training courses, it is best to work with actual materials and children or adult students. Real materials and situations are much better than hypothetical situations whenever possible.
7. Provide adequate time for questions and clearing up fuzzy thinking. This is an aspect that is often rushed by expatriate trainers. If no questions come up from the trainees after a presentation, maybe they are so confused they aren't sure what questions to ask.
8. There should be a form of closure for the larger chunks (i.e., feast, graduation, etc.) as well as the smaller units of content or skill (i.e., progress charts which can be checked off), and periodic time for organizing and revising is helpful to trainees.
9. Strive to keep a relaxed, open and light (humorous) atmosphere throughout the training process. It is a known fact that laughter enhances learning capabilities. Let the endorphins flow...

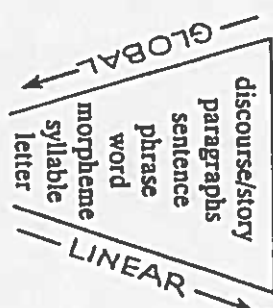
Also, keep in mind that shorter (two to three weeks) training courses which occur more often will have better long term results than longer, information packed workshops. Let's not be guilty of giving information overload resulting in burnt-out trainees (not to mention trainers!). *Revision* and *follow-up* are key elements in successful training. I firmly believe that the extra time, energy and creativity required to train globally will come back to us in multiple dimensions if we will commit ourselves to quality training appropriate to the trainees' preferred learning styles. As Arden Sanders indicates in his dissertation, it takes *a lot more work* to prepare a global teaching presentation than it does to prepare a lecture. Remember that. Prepare for it.

#### V. Multistrategy Method (MSM) on Target

Based on the global - linear model, it is easy to see why the MSM and other similar methods of teaching literacy are so successful: they accommodate both global and linear learners.

The MSM teaches literacy via two main approaches: (1) Story track, and (2) Workbook or primer track. The Story track accommodates wholistic learners—working from the top of the hierarchy down to words, while the workbook or primer approach can

accommodate linear learners—working from letters up the hierarchy toward the story level.



Literacy methods incorporating both global and linear approaches not only allow for learning to take place within one's own preferred learning style, but they also encourage development in other aspects of learning.

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